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General Assembly

Official Records

Disarmament Commission

263rd meeting

Monday, 19 April 2004, 10 a.m.

New York

Chairman: Mr. Adamia ..... (Georgia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.30 a.m.

Organization of work

The Chairman: I first call on the Secretary of the Commission.

Mr. Alasaniya (Secretary of the Disarmament Commission): Delegations have before them the list of participants in this session. It has been brought to my attention that some delegations are missing here. The reason is that we have not received a note from them. We do not need accreditation, as members know; all we need is a formal letter from the Permanent Mission. Also, I want to ask delegations to please check to see if members of delegations are missing or their names are misspelled. Please make note of such errors and bring them to the attention of the Secretariat.

The Chairman: Members will recall that we are on the way to finding consensus on the substantive agenda items. I understand that this is instead of actually discussing agreed agenda items, but as we did not have a consensus, we all decided to use this time for finding consensus on the agenda.

Over the past week, we had a number of meetings, including a Bureau meeting. I think two important points emerged. First, not one delegation was against the so-called Chairman's proposal during the deliberations; everybody said that it could serve as some kind of basis. As we understand it, delegations have sent this proposal — with, I hope, their comments — to their capitals, and we have been waiting for responses from the capitals.

Secondly, what became clear was that adjournment of this session was not possible because there were differences among delegations' approaches. So we all decided that we should continue to work towards finding a resolution of this situation. There were statements during the week encouraging delegations to work within their groups to try to find a solution. We hope that delegations now have a clearer picture. Some delegations may have received answers from their capitals.

Mr. Liebowitz (United States of America): I know that other delegations have been waiting for our response. Everybody knows that Washington sometimes takes longer than we would like, but that is just the way it is.

Anyway, I have what I think are instructions that would permit us to reach agreement. I think they show continued flexibility on the part of the United States. At this point, I hope that others will think about our approach very carefully, because I think that what we have come up with is an answer that everyone can live with and which would enable us to reach agreement very shortly.

First, I can say that we can accept both the second and third items as written. On the first, we have a couple of fairly small changes. We would like to replace the word "guidelines" with the word "strategies", which we think is a little less prescriptive.

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I think it does not really change how a discussion would in fact evolve. Generally, what in fact we come up with in the Disarmament Commission is not that prescriptive. It is more strategies than guidelines. I am not going to engage in a long argument as to whether "strategies" is really more appropriate than "guidelines". I think it is a fairly modest change that others should be able to accept without too much concern.

I can also say that, in response to concerns by some members of the Non-Aligned Movement, we are willing to delete the words "in particular". I think that shows a good deal of flexibility on our part. We thought that some phrase like that was important in narrowing things down, and therefore we are making a strong case for "in particular".

But we are willing to delete those two words in exchange for the deletion of the phrase "in all its aspects". As I have explained before, I think "in all its aspects", when applied to non-proliferation, has always been a way — and I go back, as I have told many colleagues, rather further than I would like to remember — of sort of implying that non-proliferation also dealt with so-called vertical non-proliferation, that is, the accumulation of nuclear weapons by the nuclear-weapon States. I think that "nuclear disarmament" in this title covers that; "in all its aspects" is not necessary. People in Washington wanted to make sure that this did not become just a discussion of everything under the sun in this area and therefore wanted to narrow it down. That was a way they thought of doing it without really doing damage to others' positions.

I think that with those small changes, those are three subjects now that everybody could agreed to. They provide language that everybody can live with. They provide some subjects that we could deal with in the next several years and find a use for our deliberations. I hope that people, before answering immediately, will think hard about them. Again, I think everybody in this room has displayed flexibility and has been willing to look at others' positions. I hope that others can look at our position carefully and see that this does provide a way forward for the Disarmament Commission. Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you for your patience. I hope that this will provide a way forward.

Ms. Murnaghan (Ireland): I just wanted to intervene briefly to say that we appreciate that the United States, even after some time, has come back with comments on the Chairman's proposals. We will certainly look at them seriously. It would be helpful, I think, if others were in a position to indicate whether they also have comments on your proposals.

Certainly, we will take away the amendments suggested by the United States and look at them seriously. I may be one of those who have greater optimism than others, but I still think we can reach a consensus this week. We should pull out all the stops to try and do so. I cannot comment on the changes as such at this time, but certainly we will take them away and study them.

The Chairman: Colleagues, we have to decide how we should proceed. I think that we should give delegations some more time to contact the capitals and to consider these amendments to the first item. I have to say that I am still optimistic that we may find consensus this week.

I understand the scepticism, but I think that, if we can achieve consensus by the end of this week, it will be good for the Disarmament Commission, because then we would have agreed items, and next year we could immediately start our work. I do not think that we need to speak about what will happen if we cannot do that; that is clear to everybody. If we move in a positive direction, then we will have some organizational work to do, such as reaching agreement on the agenda, creating working groups, electing chairpersons for the working groups, and so forth. All delegations know that.

If we do not, we still would have other work to do, which should be done in any case. Regarding the report of the Commission, which, as we have said, is being drafted, the draft version should be ready sometime this week; we still need flexibility to agree on the final outcome. So, in that context I am, as Chairman, in the hands of delegations.

Maybe we could have a formal meeting tomorrow morning or afternoon. That would give delegations more time to get instructions, or maybe to agree on positions among themselves within the groups.

Mr. Al-Bader (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): Regrettably, it seems that the Commission is not moving in the right direction with regard to the

forthcoming meeting, which you, Mr. Chairman, just mentioned. I propose that no meeting be convened unless a delegation or a group of delegations requests it. Given the current circumstances, it would not be desirable to convene a meeting, because we might meet and not achieve any results.

The Chairman: I have to say that we scheduled the 2004 substantive session of the Disarmament Commission a year ago, and we do not have the right to just adjourn the session and then wait to see if this or that delegation wants to continue. A number of delegations have expressed their readiness to continue to work to reach consensus.

Mr. Percaya (Indonesia): I would like to inform delegations that the members of the Non-Aligned Movement express their appreciation to the delegation of the United States for its amendments. However, we are still considering the draft substantive agenda items overall, including the Chairman's text.

The Chairman: That encourages me to think and work in the way that I already suggested: that we should give delegations more time and hold our meetings in the coming days. As time is limited, I would prefer to have a meeting tomorrow.

Mr. Issa (Egypt): I think my colleague from Qatar made a very useful suggestion, which I hope we can consider. In any case, beyond that, I just wish to point out that, in the light of very recent events in the Middle East, it may be difficult for many Arab States to participate in a meeting tomorrow because some important meetings on what has been happening in the Middle East are expected to be held tomorrow morning and afternoon. I would like draw the Chair's attention to that fact.

The Chairman: Taking into consideration the statement of the representative of Egypt, we can do things slightly differently. We can have a Bureau meeting tomorrow and have a formal meeting on Wednesday morning — but that is the latest we can hold it.

I hope that in the Bureau meeting we can gain a clearer picture of what is going on in the groups. We can also discuss the draft report. Hopefully, we could meet on Wednesday morning to finalize where we stand — either achieving consensus or achieving nothing.

Mr. Percaya (Indonesia): I apologize for taking the floor once again. Since the third session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2005 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) will convene early next week and the Chairman-designate of the Committee will be arriving in New York sometime today, I request, Mr. Chairman, that you kindly wait for a while. We will clarify the matter with the Secretariat as soon as possible today, because we are planning to convene the open-ended informal consultations on the NPT some time on Wednesday.

The Chairman: I understand that the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) is extremely important for all delegations. On the other hand, I must emphasize that the Disarmament Commission substantive session was planned some time ago, and that this time should be used for the Commission rather than for any other activities that are scheduled for a bit later. I understand that we do not want to have overlapping events. Still, I encourage delegations to devote their energy and time to resolving the Commission's problems.

If that is agreed — and I see no other requests to take the floor — then I propose that we convene a Bureau meeting tomorrow at 11 a.m. and that the Commission meet on Wednesday at 10 a.m.

The meeting rose at 11 a.m.